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ABSTRACT

A study examined the patterns of talk in discussions of literature in classrooms where students are labeled "average," and examined the perspectives of teachers and students in such classrooms on the goals and difficulties of discussions of literature. Five English teachers and their 8th- through 12th-grade students participated in classroom discussions about literature, and a few were selected for case study interviews. Interviews revealed that teachers saw the teaching of literature as an important enterprise and saw literature itself as a teacher. They viewed the difficulty in achieving student-centered, "democratic" discussions as stemming from middle-track students' disinterest or inability to participate. Interviews with selected students revealed that they too saw discussions as necessarily teacher-centered, given the clientele of the classes. Analyses of the classroom discussions indicated that: teachers dominated the discussions; teachers and students were most likely to make informative statements when holding the floor; students' remarks were usually reflective of the kinds of questions teachers asked; and teachers used their responses to students' contributions to acknowledge or restate what students had said. Results also demonstrated that although participants in this and prior studies with college-bound and remedial students had very different perspectives on the purposes discussions are to serve, the discussions themselves were more alike than different in all measured areas. (Fourteen tables of data are included; one appendix containing an annotated excerpt from a class discussion is attached.) (PRA)

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Discussions of Literature in Middle-Track Classrooms

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Discussions of Literature in Middle-Track Classrooms

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Introduction

This is the last of three reports that examine the patterns of talk in classroom discussions of literature. Our first study (Marshall, 1989) analyzed discussions among college-bound students; our second (Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990) examined discussions among students in lower-track classrooms. In this final report of the series, we will study discussions of literature in classrooms where students are labeled "average"--classrooms, that is, where students are viewed as neither distinctly talented nor as especially in need of remedial help.

The fact that such students are so often characterized by what they are not (neither talented nor remedial) suggests at least part of the reason for their invisibility in local and national discussions of schooling (Goodlad, 1983; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen 1985). Though they may represent a distinct majority of the secondary school population (Boyer, 1983; Powell et al., 1985), students designated as "average" by their teachers do not seem to invite the special attention given to students who win academic awards and college admission or to those more academically troubled students who may qualify for smaller classes and individualized instruction. There are few specially tailored programs for "average" students; there are few opportunities for them to stand apart from their peers. And perhaps because of these patterns, there have been very few studies examining the nature of the instruction these students receive in their literature classrooms.

In this report, we will describe the basic patterns of literature discussions in five classrooms where the students have been designated as "average." We will also analyze the purposes driving those discussions from the perspective of the teachers and students participating in them.

Method

Participants

Five teachers of English and their students participated in this study. To examine patterns across the grade levels, the teachers represented Grades 8 through 12. Four of the teachers were drawn from the same high school; the teacher working with 8th-graders was drawn from a neighboring junior high in the same district. The high school had been recognized as a Center of Excellence by the National Council of Teachers of English, and the teachers selected for this study were all characterized by their department chairs as highly competent instructors.

Though all of the teachers taught a variety of courses, for the purposes of the research, we asked each to select one class that was primarily involved in the study of literature and that

was designated as "middle track" (the school's term for classes for average students). The student participants were enrolled in the classes studied. With the cooperation of the teachers, we selected a smaller group of students for case study interviews.

Procedures

To examine the general patterns of the discussions in the five teachers' classrooms, we videotaped each teacher's class during the discussions of a single literary text. This involved taping four discussions in four of the classes and three discussions in the fifth, for a total of 19 videotaped discussions across the five classes. The videotapes were transcribed and later analyzed for their basic features. In order to explore teachers' and students' purposes during those discussions, we interviewed each teacher and two or more students from each class.

Interviews

We interviewed the five teachers outside of class, and while the specific questions asked in each meeting varied with the students and the text being taught, we invited all of the teachers to respond to two basic questions: 1) what were their general goals in holding classroom discussions? and 2) what problems did they perceive in achieving those goals? The number of interviews with each teacher varied from two to four depending on scheduling opportunities. We audiotaped the interviews and transcribed them for later analysis.

We also interviewed at least two students from each class for their perceptions of classroom discussions. Like the interviews with teachers, these were audiotaped and transcribed.

Videotaped Discussions

In an initial meeting with us, each of the participating teachers decided on the literary texts that would be the focus of the discussion during the videotaping. All of the texts selected were normally taught as part of the literature curriculum and all of the teachers indicated that they would spend several days discussing them with their students. On the days of the taping, we positioned a video camera as unobtrusively as possible in each room and instruction proceeded as normally as possible. All of the teachers reported that the camera did not greatly affect their own or their students' participation in the discussions.

Table 1 summarizes the information about data collection.

Analysis

Interviews

We analyzed the transcribed interviews with teachers and students for perspectives on two basic questions: 1) what goals did the participants have for classroom discussions? and 2) what problems did they typically see in achieving those goals? To answer these questions, we studied the transcripts for themes that seemed common to both teachers and students and for

Table 1

Summary of Data Collection

Teacher	Grade	No. of Students	Observations		Interviews	Text
			Teacher	Student		
Dan Stone	8	23	4	2	2	When the Tripods Came
Kim Hadley	9	27	4	2	3	The Pigman
Carrie Anderson	10	17	4	4	4	Hiroshima
Doug Overstreet	11	27	3	3	3	The Great Gatsby
Bea Kavale	12	16	4	2	3	Death of a Salesman

the more specific issues raised by either group. We then synthesized the information from the interviews into a more general portrait of the perspectives offered by the participants.

Videotaped Discussions

To examine the basic features of the classroom discussions, we employed a coding system (Marshall, 1989; Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990) that distinguishes between two levels of organization (speaker turn and communication unit) and that examines each communication unit for linguistic function, knowledge base, and kind of reasoning. In the following, we provide an overview of this system.

Organization of Discussions

To mark the boundaries that shape classroom discussions, we first segmented the discussions at two levels: communication unit and turn.

Communication Unit

The basic unit of analysis, communication units have the force of a sentence, though they may be as short as one word (e.g., "Yes" or "OK"). They represent an identifiable remark or utterance on a single topic.

Turn

The most obvious boundary in most oral discourse, a turn consists of one or more communication units spoken by a single participant who holds the floor.

Two raters independently segmented five randomly chosen transcriptions of discussions, representing about 25 percent of the data set, at both levels of organization. Exact agreement between raters was 100 percent for turns and 98 percent for communication units.

The Language of Discussions

To examine the linguistic patterns and intellectual content of the discussions, we coded each communication unit within one of five major categories and within one of several subcategories that allowed a closer analysis of its features. We describe the major categories and their respective subcategories below.

I. Direct. Any remark (even when it is represented as a question) that intends to move an audience toward an action or to shift the attention of the audience or the focus of the discussion (e.g., "Let's settle down and get started.").

II. Inform. Any statement of fact or opinion whose purpose is to represent what the speaker knows, believes, or thinks about a topic. Reading and quoting from texts are included here.

Nature of Remark:

A. Classroom logistics: Refers to the management of classroom activities (e.g., homework, roll, reading assignments)

B. Reads or quotes from text.

C. Instructional statements: Refers to the substantive issues under discussion.

If remarks were coded as instructional in focus, they were further analyzed for knowledge source and kind of reasoning.

1. Knowledge Source

a) Personal/autobiographical (information drawn from the speaker's own experience)

b) Text (information drawn from the text under study)

c) Text-in-context (information about the author of the text, the historical period in which it was written, or its genre)

d) General knowledge (information drawn from the media or contemporary culture that is widely available)

e) Previous class discussions, lectures, or readings

f) Other

2. Kind of Reasoning

a) Summary/description (statements which focus on the literal features of an experience or text)

b) Interpretation (statements which make an inference about the meaning or significance of information)

c) Evaluation (statements that focus on the quality of an experience or text)

d) Generalization (statements that move toward theoretical speculation about the nature of characters, authors, and texts)

e) Other

III. Question. Any verbal or nonverbal gesture that invites or requires a response from an auditor.

Nature of Question:

A. Classroom logistics

B. Instructional focus

If a question was coded as instructional, it was further analyzed for the knowledge source and kind of reasoning it was meant to elicit. Definitions for the subcategories here are the same as those for informational statements.

1. Knowledge source

a) Personal/autobiographical

b) Text

c) Text-in-context

d) General knowledge

e) Previous class discussions/lectures/readings

f) Other

2. Kind of reasoning

a) Summary/description

b) Interpretation

c) Evaluation

d) Generalization

e) Other

IV. Respond. Any verbal or nonverbal gesture that acknowledges, restates, evaluates or otherwise reacts to the nature, quality, or substance of preceding remarks. Responses clearly focus on the form or substance of the preceding remark itself. Answers to questions are coded within the Inform category. A remark coded as a Response to a question would ask for a clarification of the question itself or would comment on the value of the question.

Nature of Response:

a) Acknowledgement (simple indication that a remark was heard)

b) Restatement (an effort to repeat a previous remark)

c) Positive evaluation (a positive comment on a remark)

d) Negative evaluation (a negative comment on a remark)

e) Request for explanation/elaboration/clarification (any remark that asks the previous speaker to speak more clearly or at greater length)

f) Elaboration (any remark that moves beyond a simple restatement by substantively changing the original speaker's language or by offering an interpretation of what the speaker was saying)

g) Other

V. Other. Any utterance that cannot be coded in the other categories.

Two raters independently coded five randomly selected transcripts, representing about 25 percent of the data set. Exact agreement between raters was 94 percent for the major categories and 91 percent for the subcategories. A sample of coded transcript is provided in the appendix.

Transcriptions

We viewed the videotapes several times in the course of transcription in order to make sure that each speaker's contribution was accurately represented. In a very few cases, students' remarks could not be heard in spite of repeated efforts to make them out. On these occasions, we counted the student's turn as one communication unit and coded it as Other. Because such inaudible contributions sometimes may have been longer than one unit, the length of students' turns may be very slightly under-represented in the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Interviews

Teachers' Perspectives

We analyzed the interviews with the five teachers for their perspectives on the purposes informing classroom discussions and on the special problems they faced in orchestrating such discussions with average students. But in articulating their purposes in classroom discussions, the teachers usually began by articulating their purposes in literature instruction itself.

Doug Overstreet, for instance, said that for him the study of literature is central to the entire educational mission:

> I'll begin by saying that I love literature myself and I'm biased--I think that everyone else should love it as much as I do. Of course, I'm not so idealistic as to believe that everybody will feel the same way. But I think that literature can be a great teacher, particularly in terms of learning about ourselves. I think literature does that better than anything else. Sometimes in my class I make fun of math, history, because I don't know if we learn that much about ourselves in such disciplines....I think literature is the best at teaching.

Bea Kavale echoed Overstreet's observation that literature can teach students about themselves:

> I guess I want them to really think about how this fits into their lives. What ideas that the author is getting across can they use--can they find relevant in their lives. And maybe it won't make any difference to them now, but I hope, this is what I believe, I mean, this is what I kind of go on, that someday it, they'll remember this, and say, you know, I remember how these people dealt with the situation and now I can make a connection with that.

But literature can do more, according to these teachers, than help students understand themselves individually. It can also help them understand their connections to the larger world. It is a "body of knowledge" that they should share with others. Thus Carrie Anderson says:

> I'm teaching in a democracy under a republican form of government and so when I set up goals for the students there are certain things, especially for literature, that I keep in mind. Number one goal is that I want them to have a common experience whether they're middle (track), top or slow because I think you need a certain amount of conformity to make democracy work.

Kim Hadley repeats Anderson's theme and takes it one step further:

> I think as a society there are certain types of literature that we have to have all experienced so that we have that as a society .... There are certain mores that society has, and I think those mores need to be covered in literature. If one of our tasks, and I believe it is one of our tasks, is to perpetuate the society in which we live, then I think we all need some common literature which speaks to those mores.

In the view of the teachers, then, literature itself should be a "teacher" that on the one hand helps students understand themselves as unique individuals and that, on the other, introduces them to the themes and values they will share with others in a democracy. It seems a noble conception of what literature is and what the teaching of literature is for, but it was balanced in the interviews by a less hopeful conception of who the average students were and what those students could do. Dan Stone, for instance, had this to say:

I think with the average level student...one of the sources of the lack of motivation is the fact that many of them don't read well. If you don't do something well, you don't want to do it. Many of them have been read to in elementary school a lot, but I think one of the problems is very simple and I think it starts in the home. I do not think the parents have the children read. The kid comes home and he says "I'm going to do my work." Mom says fine. He goes up and turns on the TV set or the stereo and he works, but he really doesn't focus.

Bea Kavale echoed Stone's sense that average students were often distracted from their work:

They try to read in front of the TV or squish it in 15 minutes here and think that they can read 35 pages and they zip through it so fast, that's a problem.

Carrie Anderson was more detailed in her analysis of the students. She told us:

Second-trackers are made up of about three types. You have truly slow people who want to overachieve, like Bill. Have you spotted him yet? Glasses, second chair. And I do call on him and, as I said, he really needs extra help and he will come up to the lab when he gets stuck and he will come in and sit right next to me.... And then the second bunch that we have are people who are really, truly average and have ability, but they've never felt like really competing with anybody who is quite bright. And they're in here because they feel safe....And then we have--that guy that just came back yesterday, Gentry. Gentry should be in top track. He can compete with anybody I've got in top track and that lazy son of a gun does not want to work. All he wants is a C in middle track and if he gets an A the next grade will come up an F so it averages out to a C. He's got this image and he is smart enough so that no matter what I do he's going to try and circumvent it so that's the game between us.

Anderson's three types within the middle track, of course, in some ways parallel the three types of ability groups across the school as a whole. Slow, average, and bright students are all represented in the middle track--slow students because they try, bright students because they don't, average students because they are average. When the variety of students within the middle track, as described by Anderson, is combined with those same students' unproductive study habits, as described by Stone and Kavale, it becomes clear that teaching literature to the middle track may be a very challenging enterprise--especially since the teachers' articulated goals for that teaching are so broad and optimistic.

How then do these teachers perceive their own classroom discussions? Given their general goals in teaching literature, each of the teachers suggested that they would like to orchestrate student-centered discussions in which their own role would be minimal. But, given the nature of their students in the middle track, all of the teachers felt that they had to take a much more central role. As Dan Stone put it:

What I try to do in a classroom discussion is to involve as many students as I can. Basically they take two forms. Classroom discussions can be teacher-oriented or teacher-based or they can be student-based. Now (with the middle group) I can't do very much with student-based. There's just no way to do (it) because the clientele is not

there....You have to have leaders to have that student-based discussion.

Even with class leaders, though, the teachers often found it difficult to get many of the students involved. Bea Kavale described the problem for us:

> In the class you're going to see, sometimes it's harder to get them to contribute, and they will just as soon sit and listen and maybe not even listen at all and just, you know, I'm here but don't bother me. And so, I have to work at getting everybody involved whether they raise their hand or not, because not very many of them will raise their hand either. There are about, probably about five or six of the students that talk a lot. I mean they are more willing to, you know, discuss the story and who cares what anybody else thinks. And then a lot of those kids in there will just sit back and let them do it unless I specifically call on them.

The five or six leaders in Kavale's class--the ones who will discuss the story and "who cares what anyone else thinks"--are apparently not enough to encourage their peers to speak up, and so Kavale, like Stone, finds that she must do a good deal of the work in keeping the discussion afloat.

Though the teachers suggested that, with average students, their own role in classroom discussions was almost always central, they seemed to take various degrees of professional pride in that role. On the one hand, Carrie Anderson--the most experienced teacher in the group--had made her peace with the role of classroom leader. She told us:

> Having been through all the stages, truthfully, I am still teacher-centered. I guess because it works. My kids do well when they get away from me. And I get mail and they tell me what I didn't do well; they also tell me what was especially useful. When I try to do student-centered and it isn't structured, everything just goes to pot. I don't have that knack. I figure they'll get that from somebody else. It's not my style.

But even those teachers from whom students might "get" the student-centered approach seem to be struggling to make it work. Doug Overstreet, only in his second year of teaching, had this to say:

> The class is discussion-based. The students do the talking about the literature....The problem that I've noticed so far is that I'm doing a lot more talking than I wish I had to. I wish that I could do less and let the students do more. And there are a variety of reasons for that. Some unavoidable things such as the fact that the class is large and that it's the first class in the morning. (But) that's kind of like putting the blame somewhere else. 'Well, it's the first period class, they don't talk, it's not my fault, they're still sleeping or something like that.' But I don't think that's the main reason. Part of it lies in myself. I know for example, this book, The Great Gatsby, I'm trying to decide how much I need to teach from the book. Do I have to point out every little detail? I feel compelled to do so.....I seem to be pointing things out to them all the time. And maybe what I'm waiting for is idealistically for some student to say, 'Mr. Overstreet, did you see that line on page 127? What a great line! I think that he was trying to say...' Etc., etc. And instead, I'm leading them to conclusions that I have already formulated, I think. I think that might be what I'm doing rather than allowing them to formulate

their own conclusions.

We will see more clearly how these teachers led discussions and formulated conclusions when we examine the language of the discussions themselves. First, though, we will briefly examine their students' perspectives on classroom discussions.

Students' Perspectives

If the teachers felt that their own role in discussions was to guide, lead, and often inform, the students felt that their own role was to listen and become informed. Rarely, in fact, did they mention their own participation. Edward, for instance, from Dan Stone's class, answered this way when he was asked about his role in discussion:

> Listening most of the time to get all of the information in we can of what he's talking about....Basically what happens is he'll have us go home and read the chapter over and we just (go) over the big information we need to know for like quizzes and tests, that type of thing....

Melanie, from Carrie Anderson's class, had a comparable perspective. Her role in discussions was:

> just to absorb what she's saying and to, you know, if you have a question about something, ask it, or else, you know, you won't know it.

The teacher's role, according to Melanie, is equally direct:

> To make sure that we know the information well and make sure, I mean, you know, go over the book and make sure we're prepared.

When the teachers tried to do more than simply provide information, the students sometimes expressed frustration. Abbey, from Doug Overstreet's class, had this to say about Overstreet's discussion of Gatsby:

> He talks about the book and the characters and I think we spend too much time. I think we took too long on The Great Gatsby....It was not that long of a book and it's not that hard to read....Some of the things, it's almost irrelevant to say them because everyone should know it. Like about in the book that Tom is an overbearing character. Well, you get that in the first chapter. You know that, you know, it's not something that needs to be discussed, I don't feel.

There seems to be an emphasis on efficiency in the students' reports--a sense that teachers and students have designated roles, that there is an exchange of information to be conducted, and that the best classes are ones in which these things are done quickly and directly.

Don, a senior from Bea Kavale's class, gave us the clearest perspective on why middle-track students may bring such attitudes to their literature classrooms. For most of his high school career, Don had been an upper-track student in English class. He told us why he had

"dropped down" to the middle-track in his last year:

> It was my senior year and I really wanted to slow down my pace and I'm in more activities than just inside school. I do a lot of things after school and I didn't feel I needed to take a top track. I didn't want to be doing research all the time.

When asked about the differences between the top and middle tracks, Don was very direct:

> The kids are more stimulating in the top track and more interested in the group activities versus the kids in the middle track. Middle-track kids kind of whine and cry and they're kind of babies actually.

Middle-track discussions, from Don's perspective, are exactly as the teachers have described them:

> Usually Ms. Kavale does the majority of talking because, and this is just my opinion, a lot of the kids in here don't like to work. A lot them aren't that smart and they don't come up with questions. She always comes up with questions, makes us go digging for it. (In the upper-track), it hasn't been that way. (There), we discuss what we want to discuss. Ms. Kavale leads it though. She decides what we're going to talk about because I don't think the majority of the kids could actually lead a discussion.

But when he was asked why middle-track students may have such difficulties, Don was able to take a broader view:

> I think at a young age we were separated into the smart people, the regular, and the dumb. And the smart people, everybody knew, were above everyone else and they were expected to work, and they were going to learn. The middle kids said, "Ah, forget it, we don't care, we'll get through high school." They didn't push themselves. And the dumb kids, they still get help and they are pushed, and eventually could probably become smarter than the middle-track people. They might not do as much material as the middle-track people, but the material they do they will understand better....In the middle track, Ms. Kavale doesn't push it like in the lower track and top track. Not to say that she's a bad teacher for it. She does what she can, but she knows that these kids are not interested for one, and they don't want to continue on. Whereas I think that the lower track kids, they do want to learn but they don't understand. The top track kids do want to learn and they do understand.

In Don's analysis, then, middle-track students are taught to "forget it," to "just get through"--and they learn the lesson well. By the time they reach the 12th grade, the average students have learned to expect neither the extra help lower-track students receive nor the academic challenges provided for students in the upper tracks. Instead, they get by, causing few problems, raising few questions, "listening for the information" they might need for the next quiz.

We will see more clearly how the teachers' and students' perceptions of themselves and of each other shaped the language of literature instruction in our analysis of the discussions themselves. It is to that analysis that we will now turn.

The Structure of Discussions

Length and Organization

The discussions varied in their overall length (as measured by the number of utterances spoken by participants), in the number of turns taken by participants, and in the average length of turns taken by teachers and students. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the relevant data.

The length of discussions ranged from a low of 354 communication units in Bea Kavale's first class to a high of 993 units in Dan Stone's third class for an average of about 575 units per class across the five teachers. The number of utterances made during any one class depended on several factors, including the pace of delivery, the amount of time between speaker turns, and the amount of time devoted to the discussion on any given day. Only those remarks made during large-group discussions were included in the analysis.

The number of turns taken by teachers and students also varied across the teachers, although the balance between teacher turns and student turns was fairly stable across the classes. Thus the average number of teacher turns ranged from a low of about 98 in Dan Stone's and Doug Overstreet's classes to a high of about 140 in Kim Hadley's class. On the other hand, the average number of student turns ranged from a low of about 106 in Overstreet's class to a high of about 180 in Hadley's and Kavale's classes. In general, students spoke more often than their teachers across the five classes, averaging about 150 turns per class while the teachers averaged about 111.

But though the students took more turns than their teachers, the teachers on average took longer turns than their students. As Table 4 suggests, teachers' turns were longer than their students' in each of the five classes, ranging from a low of 3.6 utterances per turn in Hadley's class to a high of 8.8 utterances per turn in Stone's class. Students' turns, meanwhile, varied little, averaging about 2 units per turn across the five classes. In general, teachers' turns were about three times as long as their students': teachers averaged 6 units per turn while students averaged about 2 units per turn.

We can see an example of these patterns in an excerpt from Bea Kavale's class discussion of Death of a Salesman. Kavale is beginning a character analysis of Willie Loman:

Kavale: All right, now. Let's start with Willie. Now just think about what kinds of personality traits you can infer that he had so far. Anything as far as his worries, his fears, his hopes--you know--what does he live for? What does he hope will happen in the future? Just kind of his overall personality and what kind of person you think he is, so far. What can we put up as far as his traits?

Student: Uptight.

Student: He complains too much, I felt.

Kavale: What kinds of things does he complain about?

Table 2

Number of Units Per Class by Teacher

	Class 1	2	3	4	Total	Mean	(SD)
Teacher							
Stone	795	525	993	668	2981	745.3	(198.6)
Hadley	647	372	400	598	2017	504.2	(119.9)
Anderson	550	573	473	473	2069	517.2	(51.9)
Overstreet	528	509	641		1678	559.3	(71.4)
Kavale	354	769	595	469	2187	546.18	(177.9)
					10,932	575.4	(156.7)

Table 3

Mean Number of Turns by Speaker

	Teacher Mean (SD)	Student Mean (SD)
Teacher		
Stone (n=983)	97.7 (48.3)	148.0 (90.7)
Hadley (n=1281)	140.0 (42.2)	179.2 (57.0)
Anderson (n=949)	110.0 (8.4)	127.2 (23.6)
Overstreet (n=610)	97.7 (13.0)	105.7 (20.4)
Kavale (n=1156)	108.2 (37.4)	180.7 (80.0)
TOTAL (n=4979)	111.4 (34.7)	150.4 (63.0)

Table 4

Mean Length of Turns by Speaker

	Teacher	Student
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Teacher		
Stone (n=983)	8.8 (31.4)	1.8 (1.0)
Hadley (n=1281)	3.6 (2.8)	2.3 (1.2)
Anderson (n=949)	6.6 (5.9)	2.4 (1.2)
Overstreet (n=610)	6.9 (9.0)	2.0 (1.5)
Kavale (n=1156)	5.2 (5.7)	2.2 (1.4)
TOTAL (n=4979)	6.0 (15.2)	2.1 (1.3)

Student: Working too much.

Student: He wants a job there so he doesn't have to drive all around, like go to Boston and wherever else.

Kavale: OK, now, is that his idea or is that his wife's idea?

Student: His wife's.

Student: He doesn't think he's getting any credit for what he's done.

Kavale: All right. That's an important thing to remember about him. He's always saying how good he is at his job and how much--you know--hard work he does, but he never gets credit for it. What's the other thing he's worried about? He tells Linda kind of this secret fear that he has. About how people react to him.

Student: They don't like him.

Kavale: They what?

Student: He's too talkative, for one thing.

Student: Yeah, he doesn't look good in a suit.

Kavale: A walrus or something.

Student: Like a walrus.

Kavale: And what did he do to that guy when the guy called him a walrus?

Student: Hit him.

Student: He punched him out.

Kavale: OK, and along with that, because of these things, what is he afraid of as far as how people react to him overall? What's *really* important to him? What is the key to success for him?

Student: To look good.

Kavale: To be attractive.

Student: Well-liked.

Kavale: And well-liked. All right now. If you talk too much and if you're fat and you don't have--and if you're always working and you never get credit for what you do then, what might that mean about him?

We will be examining shortly the different kinds of knowledge and reasoning employed by the participants in their turns, but the excerpt from Kavale's class may indicate the clear quantitative differences in those turns. Kavale's students speak more frequently than she; more often than not, at least two students take a turn before Kavale re-takes the floor. But their turns are brief, often consisting of a simple phrase ("Hit him.") or even a single term ("well-liked"). When Kavale holds the floor, on the other hand, she most often speaks in complete sentences, and she often speaks at greater length, repeating or acknowledging what a student has said and then providing additional information on her way to asking a follow-up question. We will turn now to examine more specifically the language of that information and those questions.

The Language of Discussions

General Patterns

To determine the basic linguistic patterns of the discussions, each communication unit was coded within one of four major categories: Direct, Inform, Question, and Respond. A fifth category, Other, included all remarks that could not be coded within the major categories. Table 5 summarizes these data for teachers and students.

There was a general parallelism in the kinds of remarks made by teachers and students. Both groups made informative statements most often (about 67 percent for teachers; about 78 percent for students), followed by questions (20 percent for teachers; about 16 percent for students) and responses (about 11 percent for teachers; less than five percent for students). Neither group frequently made directive statements (less than two percent for teachers; less than 1 percent for students). But though the patterns were generally parallel, there were still some marked differences in the kinds of contributions teachers and students made to the discussions. Students were more likely than their teachers to make informative statements, while teachers were more likely than students to make directive statements, to ask questions, and to respond to a previous contribution.

These patterns generally held across teachers, although there was variation within the categories. All of the teachers informed more than they questioned, and questioned more than they responded. But the average percent of teachers' informative statements ranged from a low of 59 percent in Hadley's discussions to a high of about 82 percent in Stone's, while the average percent of teachers' questions ranged from a low of just under 11 percent in Stone's class to a high of about 25 percent in Anderson's. The variation in students' contributions was comparable, with informative statements ranging from a low of about 66 percent in Hadley's class to a high of over 90 percent in Overstreet's and questions ranging from under 5 percent in Overstreet's class to over 22 percent in Hadley's.

On average, then, both teachers and students were most likely to make informative statements when they held the floor. Teachers, however, were also likely to make other kinds of remarks, while the nature of students' contributions varied relatively little. We can see the patterns from a slightly different angle by examining the purposes served within speakers' turns. Table 6 summarizes the relevant data.

Table 5

General Discourse Function

Classroom	n of units	Percent of Units by Speaker				
		Direct	Inform	Question	Respond	Other
Stone						
Teacher	2359	0.9	81.5	10.9	6.6	0.0
Student	622	0.0	75.9	22.8	1.3	0.0
Hadley						
Teacher	1184	1.4	59.0	21.8	17.7	0.1
Student	833	0.0	65.7	22.4	11.9	0.0
Anderson						
Teacher	1494	1.3	63.1	25.3	10.2	0.1
Student	575	0.0	80.2	13.4	6.4	0.0
Overstreet						
Teacher	1281	5.3	50.9	26.0	17.7	0.0
Student	397	1.0	93.2	4.3	1.5	0.0
Kavale						
Teacher	1429	0.3	66.9	22.5	10.2	0.0
Student	758	0.1	85.1	13.2	1.6	0.0
Average						
Teacher	1549	1.7	66.8	20.0	11.5	0.0
Student	637	0.1	78.3	16.4	4.8	0.0

Table 6

Mean Percent of Discourse Functions Within Turns

Mean Percent
(SD)

	Direct		Inform		Question		Respond		Other	
	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student
Teacher										
Stone	2.5	0.0	52.6	75.9	26.2	22.7	18.7	1.4	0.0	0.0
(n=2981)	(12.5)	(0.0)	(37.0)	(36.3)	(32.1)	(35.5)	(28.8)	(10.4)	(0.0)	(0.0)
Hadley	0.1	0.0	53.6	63.2	24.4	22.2	21.1	14.6	0.0	0.0
(n=2017)	(5.4)	(0.0)	(37.1)	(39.0)	(31.1)	(33.0)	(30.6)	(29.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)
Anderson	0.7	0.0	52.8	77.5	28.6	15.4	17.8	7.0	0.0	0.0
(n=2069)	(2.8)	(0.0)	(30.9)	(31.9)	(25.9)	(27.8)	(26.7)	(20.0)	(0.0)	(0.0)
Overstreet	3.6	0.3	31.6	95.5	33.8	2.4	30.9	1.8	0.0	0.0
(n=1678)	(9.3)	(2.8)	(30.0)	(18.0)	(29.8)	(13.6)	(31.6)	(11.7)	(0.0)	(0.0)
Kavale	0.1	0.3	53.5	84.7	29.1	13.7	16.7	1.3	0.0	0.0
(n=2187)	(6.9)	(5.4)	(39.6)	(29.1)	(34.0)	(28.1)	(28.6)	(8.5)	(0.0)	(0.0)
TOTAL	1.4	0.1	48.8	79.4	28.4	15.3	21.0	5.2	0.0	0.0
(n=10,932)	(1.6)	(0.1)	(9.6)	(11.9)	(3.5)	(8.2)	(5.7)	(5.8)	(0.0)	(0.0)

In general, the teachers used their turns primarily to inform (just under 49 percent across the five teachers), asking questions much less frequently (just over 28 percent), and responding to previous remarks less frequently still (21 percent). In four of the classes (Stone, Hadley, Anderson, and Kavale) this pattern prevailed with informative statements comprising on average about 52 percent of the teachers' turns while questions and responses comprised proportionally less. Only in Overstreet's classes was there a relative balance in the proportion of informative statements (about 32 percent), questions (about 34 percent), and responses (about 31 percent).

Students' turns, meanwhile, were clearly dominated by an informative purpose. Just under 80 percent of their remarks within turns were informative, while about 15 percent were questions and about 5 percent were responses.

We can see an example of these patterns in an excerpt from Carrie Anderson's class discussion of Hiroshima.

Anderson: Now did you get any names for Father Kinesorge's people?

Student: Cieslik.

Student: Cieslik.

Anderson: OK, let's get through those. Spell it to me.

Student: C-i-e-s-l-i-k.

Anderson: All right, Cieslik. I think Cieslik is going to come out bad. He's going to end up with all kinds of glass in his back. Do you know anything about getting a piece of glass in your skin?

Student: It stays in and you can't get it out.

Anderson: And it doesn't come out, right? It doesn't work out like a sliver will work back out. But glass doesn't. Glass keeps cutting and going and this guy's got a whole back full and listen, this is fantastic. I'm glad you're here right after lunch. They try to take him out of the city, see. He's got this back full of glass. It's still in there. They put him on this cart, belly down, with the glass and then they try to take him along a street that was like out in the front of school...

Student: Blacktop.

Anderson: Blacktop. Asphalt. And the asphalt heated up from that bomb drop and it's soupy and the road where it isn't blacktop is, it erupted and so they're going soup, soup, soup, soup, soup, and they go over a bump and they tip him off and that poor sucker. He lands on his...

Student: Back.

Anderson: Back, and it drives (the glass) even farther in. Poor Cieslik. Oh, I shouldn't get off on that. OK, any other guys?

In most ways, this excerpt exemplifies the patterns in both teachers' and students' turns. Each of the students' turns here is short and each is clearly informative in purpose. More interesting, perhaps, is that each is intelligible only because of the context that Anderson's turns have built for it. "Cieslik" makes sense only if it is understood as an answer to Anderson's previous question. The same is true of "blacktop" and "back." In fact, the students' responses can be seen as slotting neatly into a framework that Anderson is building each time she holds the floor. Anderson builds that framework by acknowledging or repeating a student's contribution ("All right, Cieslik."), moving on to a longer stretch of exposition ("I think Cieslik is going to come out bad. He's going to end up with all kinds of glass in his back."), and then closing with a question ("Do you know anything about getting a piece of glass in your skin?").

But it is the nature of that framework, and not just its shape, that seems most interesting here. Anderson employs a kind of sophomoric, black humor in the excerpt ("...this is fantastic. I'm glad you're here right after lunch.") as a way of hooking her students into the text and making them visualize the admittedly awful details. By retelling the episode and dramatizing Cieslik's suffering ("soup, soup, soup...and they go over a bump and they tip him off and that poor sucker."), John Hersey in a way becomes Stephen King. What is lost, of course, is the serious consideration of human pain that we might expect in a discussion of Hiroshima. But Anderson risks that for the opportunity of making vivid to her students the kinds of details that they might otherwise miss. She sacrifices, we might say, a certain measure of literary decorum in exchange for a measure of color and drama, and she does so by using her turns to provide a good deal of information to her students. We will look more closely now at the nature of that information.

Informative Statements

To analyze the kinds of information that students and teachers drew upon in discussions, we first coded each informative statement for its focus: classroom logistics, reading or quoting from text, or instruction. We further analyzed those statements categorized as instructional for knowledge source and kind of reasoning. Table 7 summarizes the data on the basic focus of the informative remarks made in the discussions.

In general, teachers seemed to focus with comparable frequency on classroom logistics (about 30 percent), reading or quoting from text (about 32 percent) and instruction (about 37 percent), although these averages mask important differences across the classes. In fact, the percentage of remarks that were read by the teachers ranged from less than one percent in Anderson's class to over 60 percent in Stone's. In two of the classes (Overstreet's and Kavale's) there seemed to be a relatively moderate amount of reading on the part of the teacher (about 30 percent and about 20 percent respectively). There was also a wide difference in the percentage of statements focusing on classroom logistics. Here the averages ranged from about 21 percent in Stone's class to about 61 percent in Hadley's, who was organizing her discussions around worksheets about The Pigman.

Table 7

Nature of Information

		Percent of Units by Speaker		
Classroom	n of units	Logistics	Read	Instructional Focus
Stone				
Teacher	1923	21.2	63.9	14.9
Student	472	15.7	0.0	84.3
Hadley				
Teacher	698	61.5	6.0	32.5
Student	547	13.5	2.4	84.1
Anderson				
Teacher	943	38.3	0.3	61.4
Student	461	11.3	8.2	80.5
Overstreet				
Teacher	652	21.8	30.5	47.7
Student	370	3.2	4.1	92.7
Kavale				
Teacher	956	25.2	19.9	54.9
Student	645	6.5	2.8	90.7
Average				
Teacher	1034	30.5	32.1	37.3
Student	499	10.2	3.4	86.4

There was far less variation in students' informative remarks. Over 86 percent of those remarks were instructional while about 10 percent addressed logistical issues.

If the teachers differed in the relative proportion of their instructional statements, there was little variation in the kinds of knowledge that those statements drew upon. As indicated in Table 8, the largest proportion of teachers' and students' instructional statements focused on the text (about 61 percent for teachers; about 65 percent for students). Neither group very frequently drew upon general knowledge (under 5 percent for both teachers and students) or knowledge about authors or genres (7 percent for teachers; about 3 percent for students). Students were more likely than their teachers to draw upon personal knowledge (about 9 percent for teachers; about 14 percent for students); teachers, on the other hand, were more likely to draw on knowledge of previous class material (about 7 percent for teachers; about 2 percent for students). Both groups made statements coded as Other about 11 percent of the time.

If textual knowledge was dominant in the teachers' and students' statements, there was a corresponding dominance of summary and interpretation in their remarks. As Table 9 indicates, summary and interpretation together accounted for over 80 percent of the total number of statements made. Teachers made summary statements about 68 percent of the time and interpretive statements about 20 percent of the time. Students, meanwhile, made summary statements about 54 percent of the time and interpretive statements about 29 percent of the time. Teachers, in other words, made proportionally more summary statements and fewer interpretive statements than their students, but both groups devoted over 50 percent of their informative statements to summary. Neither group frequently evaluated (less than one percent for both teachers and students) or generalized (less than three percent for both teachers and students). About 10 percent of the teachers' remarks and about 14 percent of the students' remarks were coded as Other.

We will see some of the reasons for these patterns in the analyses of the questions that teachers and students asked in the discussions.

Questions

To examine the kinds of questions posed by teachers and students during the discussions, we coded each question for focus: classroom logistics or instruction. We further analyzed those questions coded as instructional for the sources of knowledge and the kinds of reasoning elicited. Table 10 summarizes the data for the focus of questions.

The majority of questions asked by teachers were instructional in focus (about 75 percent) while the majority of students' questions addressed classroom logistics (55 percent).

Results from the analysis of those instructional questions parallel those from the analysis of instructional statements. As Table 11 suggests, both teacher and students were most likely to ask questions about the text (76 percent for teachers; about 73 percent for students). They were far less likely to ask questions calling for personal knowledge (about 8 percent for teachers; about 9 percent for students), knowledge of the context (about 1 percent for both groups), general knowledge (about 6 percent for both groups) or knowledge of prior instruction (about 6 percent for teachers; about 3 percent for students).

Table 8

Knowledge Source for Informative Statements

Classroom	n of units	Percent of Units by Speaker					
		Personal	Text	Context	General	Prior Instruction	Other
Stone							
Teacher	286	0.7	69.6	2.8	5.2	9.1	12.6
Student	398	0.5	77.1	0.8	5.3	0.5	15.8
Hadley							
Teacher	228	14.0	37.3	0.4	1.8	18.4	28.1
Student	459	42.0	33.3	0.0	2.0	3.3	19.4
Anderson							
Teacher	591	21.7	51.1	6.8	2.9	4.7	12.9
Student	370	23.5	63.0	0.8	2.7	7.0	3.0
Overstreet							
Teacher	312	1.9	72.4	9.0	5.8	8.3	2.6
Student	345	0.0	80.9	12.2	4.3	1.4	1.2
Kavale							
Teacher	525	0.6	72.0	11.2	7.4	2.5	6.3
Student	585	2.1	72.8	3.6	7.4	0.5	13.7
Average							
Teacher	388	8.8	61.3	7.0	4.8	6.9	11.2
Student	431	13.6	64.8	2.9	4.5	2.3	11.4

Table 9

Kinds of Reasoning for Informative Statements

Classroom	n of units	Percent of Units by Speaker				
		Summary	Interpretation	Evaluation	Generalization	Other
Stone						
Teacher	286	62.9	24.5	0.0	0.0	12.6
Student	398	50.8	33.4	0.0	0.0	15.8
Hadley						
Teacher	228	55.3	11.4	1.3	4.4	27.6
Student	459	38.6	23.1	2.6	10.5	25.3
Anderson						
Teacher	591	83.4	5.4	0.3	1.7	9.2
Student	370	87.6	1.9	0.3	1.4	8.9
Overstreet						
Teacher	312	75.0	17.3	3.8	1.6	2.3
Student	345	74.5	25.2	0.0	0.3	0.0
Kavale						
Teacher	525	56.2	37.3	0.0	0.2	6.3
Student	585	36.2	49.6	0.0	0.5	13.7
Average						
Teacher	388	68.4	19.6	0.9	1.3	9.9
Student	431	54.3	28.9	0.1	2.7	13.6

Table 10

Focus of Questions

Classroom	n of units	Percent of Units by Speaker	
		Logistics	Instruction
Stone			
Teacher	258	41.5	58.5
Student	142	40.8	59.2
Hadley			
Teacher	258	44.2	55.8
Student	187	71.1	28.9
Anderson			
Teacher	378	19.3	80.7
Student	77	59.7	40.3
Overstreet			
Teacher	333	6.3	93.7
Student	17	11.8	88.2
Kavale			
Teacher	322	21.7	78.3
Student	100	49.0	51.0
Average			
Teacher	310	24.8	75.2
Student	105	55.0	45.0

Table 11

Knowledge Source for Instructional Questions

Classroom	n of units	Percent of Units by Speaker					
		Personal	Text	Context	General	Prior Instruction	Other
Stone							
Teacher	151	0.0	88.1	0.7	4.6	2.6	4.0
Student	84	0.0	95.2	0.0	3.6	0.0	1.2
Hadley							
Teacher	144	20.1	57.6	0.0	2.8	11.8	7.6
Student	54	24.1	38.9	0.0	9.3	9.3	18.5
Anderson							
Teacher	305	17.0	65.6	2.0	3.9	9.2	2.3
Student	31	3.2	93.5	0.0	0.0	3.2	0.0
Overstreet							
Teacher	312	0.6	84.0	2.9	8.3	4.2	0.0
Student	15	46.7	46.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7
Kavale							
Teacher	252	2.4	82.1	4.8	9.1	0.8	0.8
Student	51	2.0	66.7	3.9	9.8	2.0	15.7
Average							
Teacher	233	7.6	76.0	1.1	6.2	5.5	2.2
Student	47	9.4	72.8	0.8	5.5	3.0	8.5

As indicated in Table 12, the kinds of reasoning elicited by the questions were largely summary and analysis, again paralleling the results from the analysis of informative statements. About 65 percent of the teachers' questions asked for summary while about 30 percent asked for interpretation. And about 70 percent of the students' questions asked for summary while about 20 percent asked for interpretation. Together, summary and interpretation questions for both groups account for over 90 percent of the total.

General Patterns of Statements and Questions

With these trends before us, we can examine more specifically the kinds of contributions made by the teachers and students during the classroom discussions. Table 13 summarizes this information.

Perhaps the most obvious finding is that the pattern of students' informative remarks reflects the pattern of teachers' questions. Teachers' questions largely addressed the text (76 percent) and students' informative statements largely addressed the text (about 65 percent). About 65 percent of the teachers' questions asked for summary or description and about 54 percent of the students' statements were descriptive; about 30 percent of the teachers' questions asked for interpretation, and about 29 percent of the students' statements were interpretive. While such averages mask some individual variation, the general trend suggests that what students said during discussions was shaped largely by the kinds of questions teachers were asking. The teachers' questions, then, as we might expect, established the framework within which students were to think about the text under study.

More interesting than the somewhat predictable relationship between teachers' questions and students' statements, though, are the relative contributions of teachers and students to the work of interpretation during discussions. Students make interpretive statements more often than their teachers (about 29 percent versus about 20 percent), while the teachers make summary statements more often than their students (about 68 percent versus about 54 percent). Both groups most often make summary statements about the text, but through their questions, teachers seemed to be encouraging students to make interpretations based on those summary statements. We may see these patterns more clearly in an excerpt from Doug Overstreet's class discussion of The Great Gatsby.

Overstreet: Now, I want to ask you a question. How could he--Nick says that Daisy tumbled short of Gatsby's dreams. Well, I thought we mentioned yesterday that Daisy *was* Gatsby's dream. How can she fall short of herself?

Student: His dream kept on growing.

Overstreet: Huh?

Student: He kept on adding things to the dream and how wonderful she was. And it just kept on growing.

Overstreet: Um, tell me more. Be more specific. Explain what you mean. I think you're on the

Table 12

Kinds of Reasoning for Instructional Questions

Classroom	n of units	Percent of Units by Speaker				
		Summary	Interpretation	Evaluation	Generalization	Other
Stone						
Teacher	151	57.9	38.2	0.0	0.0	3.9
Student	84	73.8	25.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
Hadley						
Teacher	144	53.5	30.6	0.0	6.3	9.7
Student	54	59.3	11.1	0.0	0.0	29.6
Anderson						
Teacher	305	91.8	3.3	0.0	1.3	3.6
Student	31	90.3	9.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Overstreet						
Teacher	312	71.5	27.2	0.0	1.0	0.3
Student	15	87.5	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Kavale						
Teacher	252	36.5	62.3	0.0	0.4	0.8
Student	51	56.9	27.5	0.0	0.0	15.7
Average						
Teacher	233	65.2	30.4	0.0	1.5	2.9
Student	47	69.9	19.5	0.0	0.0	11.6

Table 13

Comparison of Knowledge Source and Kind of Reasoning
for Teachers' and Students' Statements and Questions

Percent

	Informative Statements		Questions	
	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student
Knowledge Source				
Personal	8.8	13.6	7.6	9.4
Text	61.3	64.8	76.0	72.8
Context	7.0	2.9	1.1	0.8
General	4.8	4.5	6.2	5.5
Kind of Reasoning				
Summary	68.4	54.3	65.2	69.9
Interpretation	19.6	28.9	30.4	19.5
Evaluation	0.9	0.1	0.0	0.0
Generalization	1.3	2.7	1.5	0.0

right track.

Student: Because he missed her so much he just--he thought of her as higher than she really was. I mean--because over the years he kind of forgot and he added to it to make it even seem better. And he wanted to see her again more.

Overstreet: Is that a realistic notion? What's the old adage? Absence makes the heart grow fonder. They've been apart for how many years now?

Student: Five.

Overstreet: And what does he remember of Daisy? What is it of Daisy that he remembers from five years ago. Well, that's not a very good question. Uh. When you think back to the old times, what are the parts--what are the events of years ago that you always seem to remember?

Student: The best parts.

Overstreet: Well, OK. The best parts. I know that's true for me. When I think back to my college days, or even to my high school days, I--you know--or you talk to your friends about what you did a couple years ago, and you're always talking about the good times you had--the best parts. Well, he's taken the best parts of Daisy and, as you mentioned, it seems to have just grown more and more. It's not her fault, but he's had the illusion. Why do you think Fitzgerald uses the word illusion in this case? How can Daisy be an illusion? She's right here in front of him. Real.

Student: What he thought was real wasn't really there. So it'd be an illusion.

Overstreet: What did he think was real?

Student: More of a goddess than Daisy.

Overstreet: OK, yeah. Now he's thinking Daisy's a goddess?...What has he done to create this goddess? This illusion? How could Daisy have grown to be this great illusion? She's just a person.

This excerpt illustrates how the teachers helped shape the discussions through their questions: every one of the students' contributions is in direct response to one of Overstreet's questions, and those questions seem clearly designed to lead students further and further along an interpretive agenda that he has set. But though he has set the agenda, he does not often offer interpretive statements himself. When he makes statements, Overstreet is usually describing the text or summarizing something from his own history ("Nick says that Daisy tumbled short of Gatsby's dreams"; "When I think back to my college days...you're always talking about the good times you had--the best parts."). But when he asks questions, he is usually inviting students to do something more than describe or summarize information ("How can she fall short of herself?"; "Is that a realistic notion?"; "How can Daisy be an illusion?"). Overstreet, in other words, uses his statements and questions to establish a context in which the students' interpretations can begin to take shape. And the nature of that context does a good deal to determine the

nature of those interpretations.

Teachers did more in their turns, however, than provide information and ask questions. At least part of the time they were responding to the contributions of their students. We will turn now to the analysis of those responses.

Responses

Because students' responses were so few in number (about five percent of the total across teachers), they were not analyzed further. Teachers' responses were coded within seven categories. Table 14 presents the findings.

As in our two previous studies of classroom discussions of literature (Marshall, 1989; Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990), the evaluation of students' responses occurred much less frequently than earlier research on classroom discourse (Cazden, 1988) might have predicted. The teachers here made positive evaluations of students' contributions about 16 percent of the time and negative evaluations under 4 percent of the time. The total proportion of evaluative responses was thus under 20 percent.

More typical of the response patterns here was for teachers to acknowledge a student's remark (about 25 percent) or to restate a contribution (about 38 percent), before moving in their turn to providing more information or asking a follow-up question. We can see an example of these patterns in an excerpt from Bea Kavale's discussion of Death of a Salesman.

Kavale: Generally, what kind of a sense do you get about Willie in this first part of the play--about what kind of life he's living now.

Student: A stressful life.

Kavale: Why.

Student: Because he works too much.

Kavale: OK, he works a lot. And as we found out above, his work doesn't pay off. Does he tell Linda he makes a lot of money?

Student: Yeah, at first he does

Kavale: OK, at first he does.

Student: He says, "Oh, I make tons of money." And then she like figured it out or something and then he went "Well, actually, I only made...."

Kavale: "Yeah, well, I guess maybe, if you really get down to it it wasn't quite that much." He starts out, yeah, he starts out as saying, "Boy, I made a commission of $220." And pretty soon, what happens to it?

Student: It gets smaller.

Table 14

Nature of Teacher Response

Teacher	n of units	Percent of Units						
		Acknowledge	Restate	Positive	Negative	Ask for Explanation	Elaboration	Other
Stone	156	8.3	52.6	28.8	5.1	0.0	5.1	0.0
Hadley	210	31.0	25.7	17.1	3.3	12.4	10.5	0.0
Anderson	152	23.7	45.4	2.6	5.3	17.1	5.9	0.0
Overstreet	227	27.8	42.7	3.1	2.6	15.0	8.8	0.0
Kavale	146	29.5	26.0	36.3	2.7	1.4	4.1	0.0
AVERAGE	178	24.7	38.1	16.2	3.7	9.9	7.4	0.0

Student: Subtracts it.

Kavale: Yeah, how far down does it go? Anybody remember?

Student: $70, I guess.

Kavale: He goes all the way down to $70. "Oh, whoops, I guess I forgot a few things--it's really $70."

Student: He has an excuse for the reason it was. "But they're closed--they're going out of business."

Kavale: He's very good at making excuses and saying, you know, "Well, it's certainly not my fault." OK, he does not blame himself.

In most of her turns here, Kavale repeats or elaborates slightly upon what a student has said, often as a transition to another question ("OK, he works a lot. And as we found out above, his work doesn't pay off. Does he tell Linda he makes a lot of money?"). The repetitions seem to validate what students have said and even how they have said it. Thus a student's effort to take on Willie's voice ("Oh, I make tons of money") is carried further by Kavale ("Yeah, well, if you really get down to it, I guess it wasn't that much"). By repeating students' contributions, Kavale in a way marks them as relevant to the on-going discussion. She can then either expand on the language used by the student (as repeated and validated in her response) or use it as a point of transition. In such a fashion, students' remarks are contextualized by the teacher, taking shape and coherence largely from the questions she asks and the responses she offers.

General Discussion

We had two major purposes in undertaking this study: 1) to examine the perspectives of teachers and students in middle-track classrooms on the goals and difficulties of discussions of literature; and 2) to describe the basic patterns of those discussions. Several general findings emerged.

The teachers we interviewed saw the teaching of literature as an important, if not essential enterprise and saw literature itself as a "teacher"--as a source of experience from which students could learn much about themselves and their world. Thus Doug Overstreet told us, "I love literature myself and I'm biased--I think that everyone else should love it as much as I do," and Kim Hadley argued, "I think as a society there are certain types of literature that we have to have all experienced so that we have that as a society. There are certain mores that society has, and I think those mores need to be covered in literature." The sense that literature provides a common ground for students and therefore serves an important social purpose in a democracy was echoed by Carrie Anderson, who told us, "I'm teaching in a democracy under a republican form of government and so.... I want (students) to have a common experience whether they're middle-track, top, or slow because I think you need a certain amount of conformity to make democracy work."

The difficulty in realizing these goals in student-centered, "democratic" discussions, the teachers told us, was that the students populating the middle-track classrooms were either uninterested or unable to participate very fully in those discussions. Thus Dan Stone told us that "one of the sources of the lack of motivation (to discuss) is the fact that many of them don't read well. If you don't do something well, you don't want to do it." And Bea Kavale suggested, "They try to read in front of the TV or squish it in 15 minutes here and think that they can read 35 pages and they zip through it so fast, that's a problem." Discussions then, in the teachers' own view, remain teacher-centered. Doug Overstreet is disappointed in the pattern: "I'm leading them to conclusions I've already formulated, I think. I think that might be what I'm doing rather than allowing them to formulate their own conclusions." But in at least one case, the teacher seems to be resigned to her own central role. Carrie Anderson told us: "Having been through all the stages, truthfully I am still teacher-centered. I guess because it works."

The students we interviewed shared their teachers' perspectives in a number of respects. They too saw discussions as necessarily teacher-centered, given the clientele of the classes. Only rarely did they mention their own participation. Thus Edward, from Dan Stone's class described his own role in discussion as, "Listening most of the time to get all the information in we can of what he's talking about," and Melanie, from Carrie Anderson's class wants "to absorb what (the teacher) is saying." Students take a largely passive role, seldom participating in the give and take of discussion, because, as Don told us, "a lot of the kids...don't like to work." And they don't like to work, he went on, because of the system of grouping by ability that has been in place, implicitly or explicitly, since they have been in school. "I think at a young age," he told us, we were separated into the smart people, the regular, and the dumb." According to Don, those "regular" kids quickly learned to say, "Ah, forget it, we don't care, we'll get through high school." Our analyses of the classroom discussions revealed the following general patterns:

1) Teachers dominated the discussions. Though students took more turns than their teachers (suggesting that more than one student spoke before the floor was returned to the teacher), teachers took much longer turns than their students--in fact, teachers' turns were, on average, about three times as long as their students' turns.

2) Teachers and students were most likely to make informative statements when holding the floor. Students were more likely than their teachers to make such statements; in fact, almost 80 percent of all student remarks were informative in function.

3) Students' remarks were usually reflective of the kinds of questions teachers asked, and both questions and statements were dominated by the summary and interpretation of textual information.

4) Teachers used their responses to students' contributions to acknowledge or restate what students had said, therefore validating the contribution and, at the same time, marking it as relevant to the on-going discussion. The restated contribution then became a basis for further exposition or a follow-up question on the part of the teacher.

These findings from middle-track classrooms, like our findings from lower-track classrooms, are striking for their similarity to the patterns we found in classrooms populated by college-bound students. Though the participants from each level had very different perspectives on the purposes discussions are to serve, the discussions we observed, whether they took place

in upper-track, middle-track, or lower-track classrooms, were more alike than different in almost every respect that we measured. At each level, the teachers controlled an instructional agenda that was directed toward the summary and interpretation of a text. At each level, the teachers talked much more than their students, and just as importantly, shaped what students could say through a combination of questions and responses that incorporated students' contributions into a coherent oral text. And at each level, teachers expressed a measure of frustration that such patterns endure. They would, they told us, greatly prefer classrooms where students are more fully engaged in the process of reading and interpreting literature.

The similarity of these patterns together with teachers' consistently stated frustration with them suggest that the description of current practice that we have attempted in these studies is only a small first step in the reformulation of theory and practice in the teaching of literature. Our current models of instruction in literature--models which continue to privilege large-group discussion of individual works, *explication de texte*, question-answer-response--are not at all consonant with the view of literary understanding that teachers themselves have articulated. The next step, then, is to locate models of instruction in literature that more fully represent those views and that make more fully available to students the range of experience that literature itself can offer.

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Appendix

An excerpt from Doug Overstreet's class discussion of The Great Gatsby:

Overstreet: How does he know Tom? (Question/Text/Describe)
He knows Tom separately, doesn't he? (Question/Text/Describe)

Student: He went to school with him. (Inform/Text/Describe)

Student: College. (Inform/Text/Describe)

Overstreet: Yeah, they went to college. (Respond/Restate)
Where did they go to college? (Question/Text/Describe)

Student: Yale. (Inform/Text/Describe)

Overstreet: How did you know Yale? (Question/Text/Describe)
It doesn't say Yale. (Inform/Text/Describe)

Student: It says 'Yale man.' (Inform/Text/Describe)

Overstreet: Did it? (Respond/Acknowledge)
Yeah, it did say Yale, dudes. (Respond/Restate)
And it said what city they were in--New Haven. (Inform/Text/Describe)
He even...Tom even played football there at New Haven. (Inform/Text/Describe)
They were college friends and Daisy is his second cousin. (Inform/Text/Describe)
In what year does the story take place? (Question/Text/Describe)

Student: 1922.

Overstreet: 1922. (Respond/Restate)
What season does it start? (Question/Text/Describe)

Student: Spring. (Inform/Text/Describe)

Overstreet: Spring, OK. (Respond/Restate)
Keep that in mind. (Direct)
That'll help us for the extra-credit question. (Inform/Logistics)
What secret does Tom supposedly have? (Question/Text/Describe)

Student: A girlfriend in New York. (Inform/Text/Describe)

Overstreet: Yeah, he's got a girlfriend, a mistress in New York. (Respond/Restate)
(He writes the words "secret girlfriend" on the board.)
All right, why do I put secret in quotes? (Question/Text/Interpret)

Student: Everybody knew. (Inform/Text/Interpret)

Overstreet: Yeah, everyone seems to know it. (Respond/Restate)
Anyhow, it's not much of a secret that he has a mistress. (Inform/Text/Describe)
At the end of the chapter before Nick goes into his house, whom does he see and what does the person appear to be doing? (Question/Text/Describe)

Student: Mr. Gatsby, and he seems to be reaching out for the green light and then mysteriously disappears. (Inform/Text/Describe)